POETRY QUARTERLY

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EDITORIAL

At the time of going to press of this issue the editor had just returned from a trip across the Sahara, and did not feel capable of concentration on the problems of writers of occasional verse. He therefore begs that the readers of POETRY QUARTERLY will excuse this short note as empty of intellectual or emotional content as the non-committal horizons of Africa, as also the lateness of this Winter number. a defect lately too frequent in this magazine which he hopes in the New Year to remedy. All good wishes to our faithful supporters for better—but not more—poems, and publishers anxious to accept all our new collections of verse.

THOMAS GOOD

Winter

How dumb and barren from the hill
The slurred form of the winter aspect
Seen from a room where no one speaks of death,
Black streaks deform the virgin white, the braver branches
Divided by the snow earth vomits up,
Now the sweet sap declines, the gavel's gone.

Chrysanthemums recline among the bric-a-brac
Sequestered in shadows from the uneasy light
Diffused in starts through candid panes;
We here like flowers, the watchers, may ignore but not disown
The hearse which travels through the happy town.

Cross-questioned by a riper faith, a group of witnesses return,
The peasant and the priest who demonstrate the rite.
The innocent feast of martyred nature and the Word.
Crowned by December song, the muffled bird,
Noel, Noel, . . .
The midnight carol and the Christmas bell.

That such a room reflects a world
As an inn the stable, is the season's fable
The host awaits the passing of the snows
And evergreens the early victory of the rose,
With Horus' shoots bestowed in bowls,
The comprehending earth, human and vegetable
Cleansed for the coming of the Light Invisible
Which the appalling emptiness refills.

VERNON SCANNELL

The Lovers part in Winter

It seemed appropriate that it should happen
On the day when winter consolidated
Its territorial gains; when the sky's skin
Was tight with the pain of cold and all the streams
Were paralysed, still, like a photograph.

Separately they'll hate the winter from now on,
Find its beauty not their style at all,
Hating the air in which the germ of lie
Could not for an instant live. They will fear
That mass of frozen thunder, the mountain range.

The green conspirators were dead or banished,
There was no talk of bird or resurrection;
Speech lay betrayed in fragments at their feet;
The bed was cold as snow, the fire was out
And stillborn tears froze hard and cut like glass.

They had both been cruel and dishonest;
Yet pity hurt like winter when she went
Over the snow alone. And then it seemed
Her scarlet cloak, laced by the falling flakes,
Grew ermine-white except for stains of blood.

G. S. FRASER

Sestina

Those on this last height lost like you were seekers.
These ribs that comb the wind had brushed the limits
Of rock or air that keep us from the fountain;
Tracing dried courses to a doubtful headstream
These groped from even day to star-steep darkness.
Hung on a rope of singing, swung to silence.

The thin rock trickle promised them a silence;
So through the hot and gritty day these seekers
Scrabbled towards a smooth, refreshing darkness
Till their exploring reached these glassy limits;
They found the same stone desert and no headstream
And yet day's map had prophesied a fountain.

Each held a hazel-twig to trap his fountain,
But not one twig twitched to a certain silence,
Rain filled the holes, perhaps there was no headstream.
The many maps bewildered single seekers:
Whose bones for us are other fractured limits,
Whose hollow orbs have excavated darkness.

Some cried, "There is no perfect light or darkness
For even from the navel of the fountain
The water rounds towards its wasteful limits,
The source of singing overflows its silence:
Such drops are caught by parched and weary seekers
Who know this spray for them must be the headstream."

Draw near. And know the distance of the headstream.
Tired eyes grow used to dissipating darkness;
All seems mirage to these morose, sad seekers
Who edge for ever round a shifting fountain.
What use the endless welling of the silence
To us who touch it at our mortal limits?

And yet I praise these bones that mark my limits
And move on past them, to the fabulous headstream
Where, from the rock's split skull, there sallies silence.
Where that lost nymph of water-scattering darkness
Still bathes, still lucid, in the laughing fountain,
Still with her love entices noble seekers.

I say these seekers are themselves our limits,
Whose fountain voices promise still a headstream.
Stars in the darkness, and the nymph of silence.

DEREK STANFORD

Data

What does it mean, I wonder; this image given
by memory or raw imagination
working about dark wiry-fibred roots:
an unkept grass-plot, in between small gardens,
fenced round by tarred and weather-tattooed palings.
leaning a little awry, and blistered with sun?

Unkept, but not to the point of desolation.
Such as it is, someone has cut this lawn
within a fortnight, say. The mown grass lies,
turning— beneath a dry and brassy sky—
to sullen wisps of desiccated hay.

Day brings the shredded blades no burial.
They are strewn without relief of rain or shine
about the grass-patch, flanked by tended gardens.
in a neighbourhood I have no wish to find.

MARGARET CROSLAND

At Season's Turn

Now meeting at season's turn
in a tall town where
the crowd-faces flow to an empty shore,
passing thin gleam of elms
or beckon of chestnut
as April warms, we trespass in Xanadu,
without warning wander
to each other's world; boldly
are you in the green days of my ecstasy
to snatch this fantasy of daffodils.
While I, who watched no farther
than swan's wing shaken or
smudging of blossom
against the laurel's dark,
I am ringed with immediate night
where only the blackened ash-buds break;
these, lighting your older world,
its core of stone, shine close
where blood-fraught jewels grow
through centuries of darkened fire.
You are more distant in the glow
of spring than ever winter
dragged you into storm.
People crossing these April gardens,
unseen, you take their empty hands,
while I hear danger, meeting your moment's voice.
The turning season holds its glass—
we are the crowd-face with lonely eyes.

EMANUEL LITVINOFF

The Ex-Revolutionary

A womanish boy, with one eye on the mirror,
Inhabiting a hotel room near the battlefield,
He loved the gritty choir of guns, the violent word
They made of Freedom. More than base coinage
His golden pennies cast on the bloody sand
As white bulls heeled over in the sun,
Beautiful as death in the nursery.

No longer a boy, or professionally young,
He averts his public face from that blind image
Among the rubble of the ruined garden
And trims his fame to the cut of fashion,
Urbane and a gentleman of taste
Deprecating the gods that fall on any afternoon.
For these are always doomed.
Only the fabulous calf is not cast down
But waits upon the high meridian of forty.

Once trampled by a million walkers
His thin scream troubled the city and drew
A spider trail of pain across the blank page;
Famous and jingling now with costly words,
How strange and sad he finds no synonym
For the lost angel, no metaphor among his riches
To warm with anger the breast of poverty.
And only the mirror silently retains its power.

WILLIAM PORRITT

Delay of Living

All that all my clinging thought as friend
Lies faded when to where might comfort be
My need kneels sapped of flowers to offer,
Hollows of its hands made taut with want.

As though from so much asking where would calls
Rend often peace of self-sustaining hours,
Heart gave of its hoard of fire and fervour
From thinking: who shall give, in time is given.

Then thoughts of one (when where must autumn shed
Cascading ghosts of green and ending ochre)
Who summery like a veil round the secret she kissed
Round the zeal of my lips spread her whispering hair—

O, failures face my stares, like the rich who uncling
Diamonds from their midnights and remember the thin
Fall of a coin they threw to ease a begging
In streets they could not bar from disconsolate roams.

Then all my holding boasts is poor, is tin
Compared to gold she gleamed in her giving eyes,
And with rain in the footprints her passing made
Tears blend when I kiss the shape the air conspires.

Then, O, my heart I lash this unresponding:
A death which knows life's leap when chances end;
And I cringe at the chant crude graves of cinnamon clay
Sigh by my ears, that sleep is sweet and best.

For all who are gone, unmatched by what was given
Leave less-exacting these with their pewter eyes,
Who meeting, each call each by April, when
Fog's writhings are true garlands in their arms.

DANNIE ABSE

Doll Disaster

Now I stand beside the river bank at four o'clock
in an afternoon, and a doll floats down
the river, face upward, oblivious of the river smells.
the river voices—a doll with blue wide eyes
that cannot blink or cry; with red painted lips
that cannot kiss—or tell of the five wounds
of silence, of the odour of nothing—
wet yellow hair pulled by the grey grim waters.
This is an ordinary doll suicide, painless, unmeasured,
unseen by the immaculate, inanimate ghosts
of dolls on a million cold pillows—and still she
moves lightly down the afternoon river, eyes blue,
unsmiling, unbelieving, gazing up at doll eternities.
Now a crack in her celluloid head and inexorably
she begins to drown, just after four o'clock
in the afternoon, with no noise—there the horror of it,
with no noise sinks sinks, eyes fixed, staring,
reconciled, her painted mouth useless, immobile.
. . . . . Doll, breathless doll, doll of all the world,
now at the bottom of the river, ghost unseparated,
looks up, head full of water, lies down there
meaningless, expressionless, beneath the many moving
reflections of an afternoon, lies down there
doll of all the world, doll unsmiling, unrelated,
obscurely naked, without genitals, without religion.

BERNARD BERGONZI

Godolphin in the Conservatory

Amid the ferns and dissipated Muses
this lone rococo figure sadly smokes;
one whose yellowing thought perversely chooses
to think of Life as but a vulgar hoax.

His failing cigarette no longer burns;
he idly sees the tiny spark expire,
while in the flowers and close, indifferent ferns
Erato holds a silent, splintered lyre.

When the concealing smoke has seeped away
he watches through his shield of clouded glass
the formal garden fall in cruel decay,
and sees the frost destroy the sable grass

where glittering dances once were his delight
until the roseate and hectic dawn:
now wrapped in fustian sleep he lies at night.
Goldolphin coughs, and stifles half a yawn.

No revels now with some brash Amaryllis
beneath crepuscular and evening trees;
as frozen creepers flutter off the trellis,
he turns away, aghast at all he sees.

He turns away, lights one more cigarette;
prepares to spend in languid gloom the hours
here where entombed nobility has set
these flaking statues and these weary flowers.

He rests content, and seldom cares to ask
about chimeras that might yet be found
behind Euterpe's cracked and callow mask.
Like dust, his melancholy furs the ground.

He fears the crumbling Muse, and hesitates
to finger the limp clavichord of rime,
but hums a precious air and palely waits,
in dusty silence, sadly out of time.

NORMAN LEVINE

Portrait of a Poet

(*after Po Chu – I*)

I am very lazy.
Sometimes I sit and make a poem.
When it is finished
It is unimportant.
They that see it,
Read it, and put it down.
They make little comment.

The Poets do not like my 'technique'.
The 'other people' hate its plainness.
They even say the words are unpoetic.
But I still lie in my bath
And watch the steam, race
Like mice across the ceiling.
And say the words over and over.

Heine would have praised those words.
But he is forgotten.
Villon . . . perhaps?
And he died long ago.
So that there is no one.
No one except Pound.
And he is safe in a hospital,
In some other country.

MURIEL SPARK

The Nativity

I

The Conversation of the Three Wise Men

'Wind and Slobber' said the Flate 'my words are
Slobber and wind whether I meet with another
Flate or no. I say there is no other.
And I say what only another Flate can gather.
Either way, what I say is air and water.'

The Droom said, "You're a sly one.
I was given to understand you were a Droom.
Look at your lips hewn out of sallow amber.
Look at your funny head all amethyst-encrusted.
Cut square. I should have known there is
No other Droom on earth. No-one's to be trusted.

'I' said the Aspontal 'began to realise
We could only hope to be useful to each other
That time we three were looking at maps and
Plotted the journey together. We had to devise
Some reason for coming and started saying *brother*
To each other. Don't brother me please in future.
You with the square head and you with the eyes
Inside your ears, for I never really
Believed you were Aspontals. However
We've got to follow the star.
We've got to be three.
We've got to be wise.
Till heaven and earth pass
One jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass.

II

The Conversation of the Shepherds

The Gladanka was saying 'If a ewe gives
A dead lamb and you kick her three times thrice
in the face before sunset how many suns will
Rise before her blood stinks?' And the
Weezabaw laughed rubbing his corns with a stone.
And the Shorket said 'Sod the riddle the same as
You sodded the ewe.' The Gladanka was saying
'I knew a ewe give a dead lamb every time
Till the farmer slit her belly and stuffed it back.
And the Weezabaw laughed, 'Gladys' he said
'Gladys Barker was that ewe's name.' 'Sod the name'
Said the Shorket 'of the day I married the hollow-
Bellied Gladys Barker. If she's a Shorket
I'm a cherub with six eyes.' The Gladanka was
Saying 'Your teeth grow out of your chin, you
No-Gladanka.' And the Weezabaw laughed,
'You two' said the Weezabaw 'You two will be
The death of me. You ought to see yourselves.
Whatever you both are is far far
Short of a Weezabaw. You with the vertical mouth:
Keep in your tongue or it will wash your ears, and
You with the nose on top of your head: smell out
The Principalities of Heaven for all of us.

III

The Conversation at the Inn

Samuel Cramer came down in the lift
And said 'My bed's got bugs.
Where's the manager?'
And the girl at the desk replied 'Not here.'

'Well find him quick' said Samuel Cramer
'My bed's got bugs.'
And the girl at the desk replied 'What name please?'
'Samuel Cramer' said Samuel Cramer.

'Not the poet!' said the girl at the desk.
'Well I used to be one' said Samuel Cramer.
'How you've changed!' said the girl at the desk
'Done well for yourself it's clear.'

'The manager please' said Samuel Cramer
'I haven't a notion who you are.'
And the girl at the desk replied 'He isn't here.
'Don't you know La Fanfarlo the dancer?'

'You're the worse for wear' said Samuel Cramer
'My bed's got bugs.'
And the Fanfarlo replied 'I'll bump them flat for you
But no francs please. We like dollars here.'

'Nothing doing' said Samuel Cramer
'Where's the manager?'
And the Fanfarlo replied 'He's outside
Talking to a police inspector.'

'See, old soot' said Samuel Cramer
I'm not here for my health.
I've come for a story for my paper.
What's going on round here?'

'The new tax' said the Fanfarlo 'We've got
A houseful of tax officials and taxpayers.
And a man's wanted for murder, called Monteverde.
They think they've got him here. They say's there's
Blood on his shirt and they were three days combing
The woods for him. A hot coming
He had of it I'm sure.'

'No good to me if it's local'
Said Samuel Cramer
'I thought there was going to be something big
According to a rumour.'

And the Fanfarlo replied 'Clear out.'
'You anticipate me' said Samuel Cramer.
'And pay before you go' said the Fanfarlo.
'I'll see you in Hell' said Samuel Cramer.

'I'll tell the manager' yelled the Fanfarlo.
'Tell him' said Samuel Cramer
'That the bed's got bugs, the room reeks, and moreover
There's a hell of a howling going on
In the cattle shed beneath my window.
You'd think a cow was having a dozen
If it wasn't out of season.
But in this Godforsaken country anything could
happen.'

IV

The Conversation of the Angels

Before the jubilees of Angels
They said 'What is that mess of meat and bone?'
Before the songs of Archangels
They answered 'That is no-one.'

Before the concerts of Principalities
The said 'Who is no-one?'
Before the dances of Virtues
They answered 'Man is no-one.'

Before the lyres of Powers
They said 'Each man is one and Man is none.'

Before the voices of Dominations
They said 'Which man is like another one?'
Before the clamours of Thrones
They answered 'None is like another man.'

Before the thunders of Cherubim
They said 'To whom is each man known?'
Before the swift motion of Seraphim
They answered 'Each is known to no man.'

An Angel enquired of an Archangel 'How many
Men have you seen?' And he replied 'Plenty'
And women too. Divine affection
For them isn't easy. What a collection!'

A Virtue said to a power 'What ceases
When a man dies?' And he replied 'A species,
Infinitely precious to God, being all
There is of his kind. He's irreplaceable.'

A Princedom asked of a Domination
'What is sin?' And he replied 'The consumption
Of men by men. They've all got
An itch to eat what they are not.'

A Throne to a Cherub said
'What do you reckon the price per head
Of men?' And he replied 'I'm lost
Where sums are concerned. Ask the Holy Ghost.'

While the Seraphim got ready for the fly-off—
Six wings apiece, shot with bright shimmerings,
One said 'What makes delight?'
And one replied 'The Queen of Heaven made light.'
One said 'What is to be made known?'
And one replied 'Men are to be made known.'
One said 'What do these heavy six wings signify?'
And one replied 'Two to cover the face, two to cover
the feet, and two to fly.'
One said 'What do these dances signify?'
And one replied 'The resolution of discrepancy.'
One said 'Fly, fly, for the love
Of discrepancy most common.'
And one replied 'Fly, fly
For the resolution of
Common incongruity.'
One said 'What's common to men?'
And one replied 'Uncommonnesss alone.
Fly, for the grace
Of common uncommonness
Which is to be made known.
Uncommon men become
Common to men in Christ's face
Mediator of angels and of men.'

EDGAR FOXALL

Coleridge said . . .

To pin down
in a few words
the unbidden image,
the wordless emotion.

Great poems lie
in seas of silence,
they make no lands,
they reflect no moons;
in the dark uncovered
they shine and fade—
words are but shadows
Coleridge said.

Shadows of silence,
but truth eludes
both words and image
and will not rise
from caves deep under
the glassy tides.
As lost tombs in Egypt
their tombs are laid—
shadows of notions
Coleridge said.

Thus all the fires
the mind conceives
but give smoke signals
like light on leaves,
drifting, ephemeral
in the eternal glade—
shadows, abstractions
Coleridge said.

KATHLEEN NOTT

Homeless in Beautiful Homes

(From "Poems from the North")

The city, the strange city, the foreign city
where they lower their big bright blinds as soon as sunrise
and meet you in shadow with such great clear eyes
as if modesty were their sole fruit of propinquity

and move in tall shadow-locks: a weighing steeple
guards them from glancing: and blind canals from waste
on locker-strewn oceans: they are shrewdly chaste
in this bright maze which binds them a close people.

and do not discern it, more than when at this pool
they gathered, with the ancient evening come,
warmed then as now by a fierce short spirit of home
but nothing they knew kind or beautiful

nor strange, nor even saw then jag the sky
Already their dark neighbours in that murk
were buried in their tough and delicate work
piling such pure wild bones wherein to die.

agreeing before words against the seaward move
or further wish for islands, which then they seal
by sad beasts and mad angels wrought by feel.
And is this peace of ripeness or of love?

No difference, maybe, save for such as we
by bricks spawned (blind from heedlessness not care).
For us love seeks a hung heart it may tear
and land has learned the black mind of the sea.

and all is rawness between cities, which
we are blind in, with their strange, their loyal faces.
Black death and love and flesh in the raw places:
to love, to die, to rot in any ditch

that ghosts of flesh waylaying, may tear our hearts
in: aliens too, who speak our love—
as only images such as these will prove
which were not made for nature's use or art's.

PHILIP BOOTH

Landscape

As dove or dream
in the deep mind's eye
where sight and insight stream
together in a vision
of reality,

a birdvoice captive in my tree of grief;
and in morning focus, sharp beyond belief,

a hawk hung high
in the outward air
where his wings sanctify
with hover what talons
wait to tear;

and from the windturned leaves' thin scrape,
the bird flung sunward to the sky's escape,

inbreathing death
in the instant free of curse
where time is an indrawn breath
and space is a wingflash
full of universe.

HARDIMAN SCOTT

Love Song

Let me lay my hand
Upon the hollow
    Of your side,
Feel your quickened breath
Flowing its fateful
    Lover's tide,
Drawing on the shore
Of death marks of love
    From your side.

Let my fingers reach
Where the currents flow,
    Thrust and feel
Each thoughtless eddy
That swift and twisting
    Goes to steal
The will away from
The caverns where it
    Used to kneel.

Let my hand cover
The whole map over,
    And know all
The channels the sea
Has made, the ageless
    And slow crawl
Of time on the sands,
Know love its shape old
    And primal.

So where my hand lies
Upon the hollow
    Of your side,
Let my fingers tell
The ancient knowledge
    In us tied.
Let me lose my love
Fast in the hollow
    Of your side.

NOEL WELCH

Poem

Flat is the landscape and regretfully
The waves break along this desolate shore:
On the horizon a mast.
To what strange rhythms that I cannot know
Are you subjected
Who would give myself to any sea that would lift me
From this tedious reef.
How exalted are you how debased
Do you feel sometimes like a church steeple
And sometimes like a sinner small with fear
And are you in the entire calms
Aware of your nudity
The sun spreads a sail
Its brightness elects it from the common whiteness
That attracts it to itself again.
Beautiful and vacant is the sky
Beautiful the unsung song of unknown birds.
Hold fine sail to the exacting mast it alone
Rigorously insisting on your existence
Divides you from the immeasurable blue.

ERIC NIXON

Spanish Landscape

I saw in the glass at the train halt
the burning gardens of the sun,
the red roofs and the olives
and a sad ox still as a stone,
wearing its darkness like a god;
and the engine whistled to the hills
challenging the golden dream, yet
there came no answer from the walls
and the ox like a statue remained
unmoved, black as a hole cut in the land.

A. S. THWAITE

The Anonymous Adventure

The anonymous adventure of the flesh
I celebrate, down corridors which led
Nightwards to the enigma of your arms,
The single glimpsed dark exit where I fled
Only to find myself. The sullen storms
Frustration filled my sky with, you let dash

Against the pinnacles of my desire.
Bought you were, yes, and under clouds of vague
Alcohol there I saw you. But you lay
Deep at the centre of the mysterious wave
Which folds us over with our destiny
And whose birth was, and death is, in your fire.

O Tanit, Venus, Juno, Magdalene,
Entering the womb by ransom, we discover
Not the intrinsic gasp of lust, the slack
Embrace, or the whore's smile. As a new lover
We trace the maze of being, and go back
To the first glimmer in a childhood dream

Of that tall stranger who confronts us with
The question of our home. Do we belong
In the loud world of bricks and blood, and see
Only the flickering image of our long
Journey, and no sure glimpse of certainty
But only the entrancing web of myth?

In that dark moment at the heart of this
Silent and aboriginal act of love,
Did the conundrum seethe out of the roar
Of blood about my ears? What sky above
Looked on this struggle, and saw in a whore
The terrible necessity which is bliss

Or suicide, the latent inward fight
Along the trudging stones mortality
Strews in our road? And was it, then, the day
Which shone on our restless equality
When in the labyrinth of your limbs I lay
Unknown, unknowing, anonymous in the night?

OSWELL BLAKESTON

First and Last Supper in the Garden

An hour ago you left the ribbon scent of peel.
I'd planned to share a festive meal but you
like slow-loris at the Zoo who
winked a nun, had come to say
the end before we had begun:
And so you ate up all my proffered fare
to show you really didn't care and I
too hurt to warn you then that my small fruit
were sour,
a table decoration for another apple story.
Barbarian! with true-false teeth
you neatly munched up history's dowry!

ELIZABETH BARTLETT

Psychiatric Clinic

Wavering through the wind like the cry of a child
St. Marylebone strikes the hour on this mild
October morning.
Tchehov knew us. In mourning for our lives
We wait here on stiff upholstered chairs,
Behind this closed door marked adults;
But we are all children, though grey hairs
Disguise us and wedding rings adorn us,
Though children have been born to us
In our turn.
This is the turn of the year.
We have travelled here
Alone through the rain and the falling leaves.
We are patients, we are cases,
But we have managed our buttons
And tied our own laces.

Here we are.

A young woman inwardly crying
For a mother who will not come,
Who cannot come again, is gone, is dying,
In a second of time,
In the fall of a leaf.

Here we are.

A blind boy holding his stick
Like a white gun,
Seeing a dead child stretched on the pavement,
Never seeing him
Get up and run.

Here we are.

A parson whose Father inhabits no heaven,
Creator of his own hell.
His church bells
Are the cries of his mother in childbed,
Twenty years ago.

Here we are.

A pale girl watching the rain,
Looking out through the bars of her cot,
Where the shadow falls
On the nursery walls
Again and again.

Here I am.
I wait here on my stiff upholstered chair,
With a rain-wet face and a dead leaf in my hair.
I am boy, girl, woman, parson; all pain
Is mine in the death of the year and the tears of rain.
Wish when you catch a falling leaf.
Where is the wish?
Only the grief
Remains.
Three flights up I must go, and many more
Than three flights back, before
I shall know.

LEONARD HARLEY

The Prayer

There is a prayer
in our wild laughter:
we pray that the wildness
will not be dissipated,
we pray that the laughter
will not vanish
when the morning
bludgeons at the drawn curtains.

SYDNEY TREMAYNE

Fragments of Change

Two images pursued me. The red rose
Hid the same secret as the shattered mountain.

There was a beetle in the rose
Snug as a bullet. In his jaws
He gripped the life of poetry.
Beautiful in a way he was,
The sweet oils of the garden his,
And he shone green as jealousy.

Down through the darkness I pursued
The burrowing secret of the blood;
Suffered the heavy drunkenness.
Spinning cadenzas of fine flutes
Unwove my fabric of five wits,
Bound helpless as a chrysalis.

Under the waters of the earth
I sank to bear a second birth.
Out of the darkness rose a rock
And through that rock a nail of light
Struck into space, holding up height.
Upon a bare hillside I woke.

★

Here were no slopes where deer lie down
In foot-high, emerald grass by gushing streams,
But a steep side gashed by gullies and boulder-strewn
Where a mangy weasel looked at me over a stone:
A thin place, but some life endured in it.
I climbed until the sweat ran into my eyes,
And came to a ridge that was naked as a cairn.
Here all was ruin. Here there was nothing living,
Neither buzzard nor ptarmigan, stonecrop nor green thing,
Not a patch of moss, nor even a lichenous stain

On jagged quartzite rubbled by the rain;
And the sun fell like a hammer on the stones.

How bright the loch was, framed by pinnacles,
Far down below with its salmon-coloured sand.
The light splashed on the loch like rain,
The flash and dance of it there a golden gain,
A gift of vision that took away the sight.
I talked to myself that there might be a voice
Amid crumbling rock to praise light, water, air,
Whose change and interchange do not endure
The stark indignity of stone and blood.
But though I talked the hills under the seas
And raised new Ararat out of the flood,
In truth I faced the beetle in the rose
And Time that will make fossils of my eyes.

Then came the thunder shunting round the hills.
The elements drove me out. The sudden streams
Swept clattering down th screes. Thunder and gods—
No wonder the sparks still tingle in the hair!
No hankering after unity could lure
The god in my bones who meant to be elsewhere
And I laughed out loud at the triumph of having
existence.
But when the old savage in my skull again
Lay down by the loch shore in the sun to sleep.
A small breeze came and stroked away his face.
The sky was under the mountain, over and under.
White stones in the sun, sea pinks and lappering water,
All day the water lapping upon the stones,
All night upon the stones. And the sky was under.
Over and under the mountain. Over and under
The light slid with the water, nibbling the stones,
The white stones under the water, chevrons of sunlight
Wrinkling and breaking and following over the stones.
And the sky was under the mountain.

*

Where are they going, to and fro
(Whisper of feet, fine grains poured out of a hopper)

The strangers who wear themselves against the stones.
Where are they going over the stones of the street
In the heat of noonday under the long white tails
Of thoroughbred aircraft streaming? Far below,
Down cliffs of tall white buildings, tall grey buildings,
The light falls and the tides sway to and fro.

*

It was a merry muck-cart man
Who clattered with his bin.
Bring out your dead, bring out your dad
And shove the bugger in.
And if I catch you moaning
I'll bend you upside down,
So knees up, knees up, knees up, knees up, knees up.
Mother Brown.

It was a foul-mouthed muck-cart man
Who capered like a clown.
Bring out your gods and odds and sods,
The bright stars of the crown.
Whoever won't stand up, he said,
Can bloody well fall down,
So knees up,
knees up,
knees up,
knees up,
knees
up
Mother
Brown.

*

Drowsing in the sophisticated gardens
By the lakeside where a shower of laburnum spills,
Shading bright little ducks that float like toys.
I heard the city muttering over its stones,
A low and distant noise across wide lawns
Set with an ancient elegance of trees.
The day with all its faces flowing

Was leisurely about its going;
It was an hour of lingering and ease.
And eyes made out the curious palaces
Half in reality and half in dream,
But most, I think, in dream,
Wandering lightly over surfaces,
Approving the proportion and the poise,
The clean, firm line, the soaring grace
Supported just by daring to arise.
All these were dreams that had been made with hands,
But now our palaces are offices
And little stands of ours that anyone needs.
I took the rose from my coat—
The sick, cut rose—
And dropped it into the water. There he lay,
The infant Moses, hidden in the reeds,
Who must ascend into the shattered mountain.

★

A small breeze idly rocked the palaces.
The light rained into the water.

Love, there is nothing we shall keep.
Time will have all of us; we shall be changed,
Changed without end throughout infinity,
And our identity—
This power to know we do not understand—
Must shortly leave us. Life's intensity
Lies in our being's change, and I am glad
That love is, as it is, immeasurable,
By which I know
That life may be growing to its end.
And I rejoice, and I am filled with grief,
And there is nothing simple to be said.

★

I talked to myself that there might be a voice.
The thunder answered and I was afraid.
I heard the city muttering over its stones
And sat there thinking of stillness and the dead.

THE POETRY OF J. C. HALL

HALL must be thought of as an isolated survivor of those poets who came of literary age at the outbreak of the last war, of what he calls

a lonely generation born
Out of violence, into violence thrown.

Almost exactly contemporary with Keith Douglas and Sidney Keyes, he was originally united with them in some of the magazines and anthologies which appeared in Oxford in the late thirties and early forties; at that time, indeed, all three came from similarly situated families within a radius of a few miles on the borders of Kent and Sussex.

The communion of experience ceases here, though all three were of course brought forward beyond this point on the same literary wave, published together, and shared to some extent similar reactions to previous poetic movements. It would be possible to find in the work of Hall or Keyes examples of "apocalyptic" imagery, as was done recently in the case of Douglas by a reviewer in that inflated weekly booklist, *The Times Literary Supplement*. In the early Hall, thus, we have "apocalyptic" *conceits* like "Beetles bringing/Thunder", "grass/Growing like poetry", and so on. Moreover, there are verbal similarities, typical of common education and environment, in all three; compare, for instance, Hall's "The blind man begging pennies for his eyes" ("The Fault") with Keyes' line, "Nor any coin to close the tired eye" ("The Uncreated Images").

Somewhat appropriately, however, Hall's first collection (it was hardly the cognomen given it, a selection, since he had written little and excised only a few poems) was with Keith Douglas and Norman Nicholson in a Staples volume of 1943, entitled *Selected Poems*. The union was appropriate because there is, throughout Hall's work, something steely and precise, a fierce chastity of purpose, and a terror, too, become pure, enduring will that links him closer to Douglas than to Keyes. At the same time, scanning the meagre, but intense and fastidious corpus of his achievement, one sees that Hall shares with Nicholson an insistence on a strict metric, usually with a tight rhyme-scheme, unusual amongst their English contemporaries (though current in America).

But however closely we may join topography and myth in this

case, experience sharply sundered these men. In February 1943, the date of Hall's debut in book-form, Keyes, possibly the most readily able of the three, was preparing to leave for an almost immediate death in action; yet Keyes' inclinations were to the end scholarly, metaphysical. One has only to glance at his titles to remark this; and his last letters speak of writers, painters, musicians. Douglas was then in North Africa; and Douglas, whilst detesting all that war stood for, seemed to me, in brief meetings in Tunisia, mentally and emotionally invigorated by the life of action, and the role of vagrom, which Eighth Army life entailed at that time.

Hall's case was different. Finding himself with strong Quaker sympathies (although not a Quaker himself) on the outbreak of war, he was exempted from military duties and plunged, with characteristic sincerity, into years of manual labour in social service communities and on small farms run by Quakers. Here lies a key to his work. Excommunicated from that compulsion from without which descended so fortunately upon Keyes and Douglas, and Alun Lewis, Hall was forced to work from the bright flame within. To effect a real breakthrough into his work, indeed, it may be useful to have some idea of such Quaker communities with their intense spiritual integrity and firm religious discipline. For it is from this that Hall's gift derives.

Let us glance at the handful of poems he gave us before the additions in *The Summer Dance* (John Lehmann, 1951). The religious nature of the experience is at once evident. In "The Poem", where the advent of poetic inspiration is described, the revelation is religious:

> *In the moment the simple sentence moves*
> *Across my mind to suffer on the tree,*
> *And I have weighed it on the tilt of leaves*
> *Whose flush of sap is vinegar to me.*

This *moment privilégié* is quite different from similar instants in Keyes (*Time Will Not Grant*) or Douglas (*Spring Sailor*), where the ideal seems closer to that of *artifex*. For Hall, the "making" of poetry is literally "Sweet Miracle". If we start from this conception of Hall's work, he falls rather happily into a direct English tradition, that principally Christian conception in which the poet is a privileged perceiver for whom the created universe is a poem, and metaphor the lovely witness to "the book of God's works". Spender indeed, in an ephemeral review

unmarked by either enthusiasm or discrimination, likened the early Hall to Hopkins in one poem; but this poem ("At a Window") is entirely exceptional in Hall's work, one of two out of the twenty-one under review which contains no rhyme. Yet there is something of a fluke in the comparison: there is alliteration in Hall's use of nature imagery and for him, as for Hopkins, the poet is to "emulate its maker". In "Curtains" (omitted from *The Summer Dance*), the poet turns into a second Christ:

I with the stigmata and scars
Nailed on a crucifix of stars.

The sonnet, "Braving the Furnace", as well as "Candlemas", may be read as affirmations of human love as a step to divine love, while in "Metropolis", a strong poem left out of the first collection and *The Summer Dance*, but to be found in the Ledward/Strang anthology of 1942, a picture is painted of the contemporary capital city, and two heroes whom the poet must "live and labour by" are evoked. These are Shakespeare and Christ. For Stephen Dedalus, we recall, Shakespeare had created the most in the world after God. Hall's Shakespeare and Christ illide in one single, wounded figure. Moreover, Stephen's vision in Circe was of a Shakespeare paralysed. For Hall, also, he seems "most beautifully spared" only to be crucified on the cross of the modern metropolis.

It is possible, of course, to push this case for Hall as a religious poet of great vividity too far, but this side has been singled out since it most immediately distinguishes him from his contemporaries. War experience, as such, does not figure largely in the early material. Possibly, as has been suggested, the violent and cruel nature of physical experience in combat must stimulate the poetic mind. The output of poetry in the war testifies to this. Keyes certainly was passionately anxious to speak. "I am not a man but a voice," he wrote in May of 1942, adding, the afternoon before he was killed, "I shall have a lot more to say about this when the time for speaking returns."

Hall's experience in this way was more crippling to poetic endeavour. The years 1943-1947 in his canon remain blank. Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart. Between the publication of early 1943 and that of late 1951 there have been, it appears, only about twenty careful poems, most of which, however, seem strongly permanent and particularly rewarding in the metrical morasses of to-day. In any case, as

Patric Dickinson has suggested, when reviewing Douglas' *Collected Poems* in *The Observer* for the 23rd September 1951, it may be that there is no such thing as a "war-poet", there are merely good and bad poets writing in wartime. There is one poem in Hall's early work which deals directly with war experience and it, paradoxically, is one of the most moving. It is called "Elegy on a Hill" and proved strangely prophetic of the death of his young airman brother in action. The catastrophe is made cosmic. This "burning Martyr" has cast himself down phoenix-like in a ritual reminiscent of "The Windhover". It is placed, suitably, at the end of the first volume. What has now risen from those ashes?

Perhaps we can say, first, that the religious experience still seems basic to the additions of the recent volume, *The Summer Dance*. At any rate, with this background in mind, we can possibly approach these new poems more capably than those reviewers who seemed entirely ignorant of the *milieu* in which the first work erupted, notably the critic in that left-wing weekly whose comfortable indignation has moved a Scottish contemporary to a rechristening—*The Misstatement and Insinuation*.

Out of the nineteen new 1947-51 poems at least four carry direct Biblical allusions, whilst the Christian mythos informs indirectly the majority. At the same time there are two notable developments: a slackening in emotional tension, in fervour, and a compensatory increase in tenderness, compassion.

Hall's wartime world contained a white heat, a Gidean "ferveur" (or "inquiète ardeur" as Gide also called it in *Les Nourritures Terrestres*), that "hard, gem-like flame" Pater advocated and which brings Hall's work closer to Douglas' than to Keyes'. Behind the curtains in Hall's poem of that name lies a "wink of terror". Madness, hysteria, are glimpsed through such cracks in the surface of things. Now, later, lack of mental balance is no more apostrophized, it is sympathized with (in "The Fault" or "Suicides"); this seems a significant, if not unexpected, change.

In the early "Hours Like Tears" the poet runs away from the city in "burning terror", and again, in this poem, meets a mad man. This first, wartime place is pitiless. "The shipwrecks of bone appear." The young poet moves *simultaneously* "To the heart of love, to the heart of danger." In a cruel rain he wonders how six street singers in Piccadilly can withstand the "splitting thunder stumbling through the mind." There is static, peaceful loveliness in the thematic "Love was the worm that lit me by",

but generally the poet's wartime eye beats down upon a world in "mad tumult". Here, the lover and the enemy are one, "The year's Cordelia who wounds and heals." Dawn breaks like a furious storm in this fervid landscape. The cross of love becomes a point of battle. The poet escapes, flees. The personal passion burns "Like Christ's candle in his heart," whilst "Worlds burn in my skull." Hall, here, is urgent. "Desperate mad men," he addresses Keith Douglas, "covet our death." To Alan Rook he concludes:

> *O mortal, political and naked man*
> *Who meets me in the strait and in the street,*
> *When I may take your hand and feel the sweat*
> *Of your own fever on me, then I'll know*
> *What this dawn-storming battle leads me to.*

Something of this tension has eased. It is still present in poems like "Above the Bay" or "Death in the Mountains", but the mood is now quieter. Everywhere the poet seeks now what he calls "the signature of grace." Nothing better crystallizes this development in attitude than "The Fault", in which pity has replaced a reaction which would, in the younger man, have possibly been anger.

As to Hall's metric, only a brief word can be said here. "I have tried," he writes in a letter, "to develop a clear, forceful metric not without its own subtleties." Nearly all the new poems are tight, spare forms aimed to disguise, then unfold, in the manner perhaps of Blake's songs. There is, too, an increase in song-like quality in the last work. Yeats is invoked. The poet has become interested in children. Elizabeth, significantly, sanctifies the title poem, which does indeed have that undertone of horror often found in the sixteenth-century English lyric. However this new metric Hall is evolving (this "poetry I could truly call my own") may be judged, one can only feel admiration for a poet working along this level in England to-day when it is so much against prevailing fashion; indeed, amid the easy, beguiling, yet fundamentally dissatisfying discursiveness of contemporary neo-romanticism it strikes as sharp and experimental. The tradition of craftsman is preserved. Out of the thirty-six poems in *The Summer Dance,* five are fairly directly about making poems. This concern, it will be said, is shared by Day Lewis. But Hall's handling of verse-form is much tougher, his rhythms much firmer and less sentimental, than Day Lewis'.

If, however, in content, the edge of terror has been blunted in Hall's later work, if now an elegiac mood has been engendered, we are rewarded by an increase in compassion. There has been a positive retraction. "The only clue," says one poem, "To themselves lies in themselves." Assessing his own "Thirty Years," the poet concludes his work, "I turn to face myself." It is as if the phantom of the title poem has "Burned all my being bare." Fortunately, in this case, the poet has a fund of spiritual resources, a deep inner life which has softened his attitude with a consoling humility:

Were we not taught,
One thousand nine hundred and fifty years ago,
To quench pride utterly, or else to suffer so?

Douglas, too, might have developed in this way. For this critic Douglas' world is too clever and too cold to enter into with any great sympathy. If Hall's world, then, has lost fear, it has been enriched by that pity which stands at the heart of love, that compassion which alone informs all true art. It is an honour to pay tribute to a poet of thirty who can write of suicides,

Tragic their deaths, more tragic the aching thought
That had we been there
We might have laid our hands on their hands and cried
"Do not despair!
For here, even here in this living touch, this breath,
May be the secret you seek in death."

GEOFFREY WAGNER.

FESTIVAL POEMS

Poems, 1951, the Prize Winning Entries for the Festival of Britain Competition, with an introduction by JOHN HAYWARD (Penguin Books, 2s. 6d.)

ALTHOUGH the English have contributed more by their poetry than by any other achievement in the arts to that refinement of thought and sensibility which characterises a civilised society, the only official support given to poetry during the past three hundred years has been a small allowance to a poet Laureate." So observes Mr. Hayward, and the observation is sufficient to make the most complacent "poetry lover" wonder whether without unofficial patronage poetry of any merit can survive at all. Such unofficial patronage has in the past been made possible by the existence of a leisured and cultivated class, itself not afraid to mould taste and determine working conditions, a group of publishers left sufficiently free of pressing financial strain to be able to publish poetry on its merits (rather than journalism on the strength of its estimated immediate monetary return), and a stable economy within which the paper manufacturer and the printer have not needed, as they do now, to tyrannise over their clients with inferior workmanship and extortionate prices. Such conditions are at an end now and it is unlikely that they will return in our time, or even our great grandchildren's time. On the other hand the all-powerful State has shown willing to patronise the arts to a limited extent and a supposedly independent Arts Council has been set up for this purpose. Now is there any reason why, so long as a reasonable amount of this new plutocrat's riches are available to support poetic ventures, poetry should not thrive? The true poet is notoriously independent: why should he worry whether he eats and drinks at the expense of a noble baron or a disinterested bureaucracy? There are signs that the principle of patronage of poets is being adopted in this country not only by the State but also by Universities. Leeds University now has a tame poet in residence. Oxford has selected a poet for the post of Professor of Poetry—a post previously occupied by distinguished teachers who did not pretend to be poets. The State itself, through the medium of its Arts Council have, as far as I am aware, so far undertaken only two modest projects to further the poetic Muse in Britain. First they have assisted the P.E.N. Club financially

in its poetry readings on Sunday afternoons at the Mercury Theatre and second, they have awarded £1,100 in prizes to poets of the British Empire and the Republic of Ireland in the competition which is the subject of this notice. In the former instance more good is being done in my opinion to the actors and actresses who "elocute" the poems than to either the poets or the poetry, for the notices which are sent round by post to "likely people" announce in large block capitals the names of the readers, but do not mention the poets or the names of their poems. In the second case, we must judge the success of the venture by the results, namely the poems in the book under review. It is unfortunate that the lack of distinction of these poems is so marked that most people will be forced to agree that the principle involved is more interesting than the poetry produced.

The results of the competition are indeed disappointing, but the optimist will rightly insist, does that prove the principle a wrong one? After all, Dylan Thomas was "discovered" by the literary editor of the *Sunday Referee*, Mr. Hayter Preston, in a competition (long before that modern genius came to London, to notoriety, or the B.B.C.) and—if more authority is needed—were not the Golden Gates of Ghiberti the result of an open competition in which Donatello, Brunelleschi and other great artists were all competitors? Perhaps in 1951 we have just, as Mr. Evelyn Waugh aptly puts it, "struck a bad patch." However this may be, it must at once be recognised that *Poems 1951* does not contain work anything like representative of the best poetry written in Britain, the Empire, or Ireland during the festal year. Whether our best living poets—Mr. Walter de la Mare, Mr. T. S. Eliot, Dr. Edith Sitwell, Mr. Robert Graves, Mr. Roy Campbell—actually entered the competition, is doubtful. Whether any of the second rank of our poets risked an entry—shall we say Mr. Day Lewis, Mr. MacNeice or Mr. Thomas—is likewise not to be known. However that may be, none of the winning poems can compare with the average work even of any one of these distinguished minor modern masters.

If I appear to be rather condemning in my judgment of the winning entries it is neither because I myself disagree with the idea of a competition, nor—and I am sure that this possibility will have suggested itself ever so gently to many of my readers!—because I am myself an unsuccessful competitor. The editor of this magazine was wise enough to stipulate that the author of the review should not have been a competitor—so

"sour grapes" are not the cause of my melancholy findings. I do not think competition a bad thing; indeed it generally raises the standard—whether in love, war, trade or the arts, and so is much to be commended. It also has the virtue of weeding out the fifth rate. I recall that the annual award for the best poet of the year in the United States, from whom we have much to learn both in scholarship and the arts (not to mention Love, War and Trade), has gone in successive years to three of America's greatest poets—Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, and John Crowe Ransom. It is worth adding that some at least, if not most, of the American judges, were themselves poets and that though they acted as an agent of the Government, they were honest and courageous enough to select for the first award of the prize, a man whose loyalty to their country had actually been called in question. One wonders whether the panel of professors (not one of whom is a poet) who selected our prize winners, would have dared to offer to the British Public, that great know-all, a poem in which any really strong views were expressed.

Well—the cabbages have been doled out in St. James's Square. Our country's poetry will be judged by foreign nations in the light—or rather twilight—of these poems. They are in the main undistinguished in their diction, unattractive if not actually ugly in their phraseology, almost devoid of technique, deficient in nobility of feeling and with one exception quite uncommunicative of that great depth of emotion which is the *sine qua non* of poetry. In a word, style is lacking, content meagre, expression unfulfilled. The two best groups of poems are those by Mr. Jack Clemo and Mr. Clive Sansom. The former is mature and poetic but cast in so minor a key and in a language so near to prose as to fail to grip the attention. The latter is a longer collection of poems on the life of Christ in the form of soliloquies in the mouth of sacred and profane characters of the New Testament. Mr. Sansom really takes us into the Greek Mediterranean world of the Gospel story and in poems which are true to the facts and the feelings of the early Christian story, presents *dramatis personæ* which are really moving and reverend without in any way being literary or forced. His scenes are vivid, his characters' attitudes consistent with the greater unity of the whole poem—which is aptly entitled *The Witnesses*—and his language natural without being too prosaic or uninspired. It is thoroughly "contemporary" in feeling, contemporary with us on the one

hand, and with the Gospel story on the other. The style, on the occasions that any true style becomes really apparent, is akin to that of Mr. Eliot's *The Journey of the Magi*; but its loosely discursive and narrative manner precludes any great moments of poetic ecstasy such as are concentrated into that miraculous short poem.

The names of the other prize winners are Gerald Bromhead Walker, T. P. Fletcher, Robert Conquest, J. C. Grant, Theodore Nicholl, and L. A. Redford.

If the Arts Council is to do anything further to patronise the Muse of poetry it will have to avoid making a farce of its actions. It would have been better to give no prize at all on the grounds of insufficient quality. But a much better idea would be to run a small magazine of say thirty-two pages quarterly for new poetry to sell at say two shillings—a little venture which could be made (almost) to pay for itself—and to spend the bulk of its allotted money (if any more is ever allotted by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is hardly likely to be encouraged by the present Festival Poetry) on commissioning special works from individual poets who have already proved their work or at least shown some promise.

PETER RUSSELL.

-ALL A POET CAN DO IS WARN

And All But He Departed by ALEX COMFORT (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 7s. 6d.)

"All a poet can do today is warn," maintained Wilfred Owen in the notes for the Preface to a collection of his poems, "That is why the true poets must be truthful." It may justifiably be said that Dr. Alex Comfort has assumed responsibility in our own troubled age for the task which was interrupted by Owen's death, a responsibility made even more onerous and exacting by the actual presence of the dangers to the individual sensed, if not clearly foreseen, by Owen when he wrote—"None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress."

From his first book of poems to his latest, *And All But He Departed*, Dr. Comfort has been faithful to his conception of the poet's function today, that of warning his own generation

against the inevitable consequences of sheeplike devotions to the State or rather, to the "clowns turned ringmasters" who exert political power in the name of government:

> *because no idle flaw of weather drowns*
> *cities. It is obedience that drowns*
> *where it has been, there is only a level mirror*
> *reflecting dutifully what the sky shows it—under,*
> *ruins, and living things given to fishes*
> *everything human broken, white, falling apart.*
> *This was a city where too few refused*
> *and every yes-man's mouth is filled with sand.*

"One of the properties common to humanity throughout all the historical periods to which we have access," he has remarked elsewhere, "is a congenital inability to form a community which does not involve the abuse of power." It is this abuse of power and the essential nature of freedom which have been the main preoccupations of all Dr. Comfort's writing; and in his poetry we can trace the development of his thought, and note the emphasis he has placed upon different aspects of the human tragedy. Both pity and anger, to a degree rare in modern poetry, are expresed in his poems--pity not for the individual alone, but for all mankind, symbolized by the child in *Seeing the News Film*—

> *. . . You stay with us*
> *on a white ground, dark—on the white ground*
> *dark, beside the path, a liberated child*
> *an after-image of the colder light*

—the prisoners in their chains, or the Spartans "who took their orders and died/holding a pass of beach"; anger which rouses him to utter such bald statements as

> *London, Berlin, Duty, Freedom, Order*
> *to be preserved at any cost, black boots*
> *on roads they do not know, polished but unwilling . . .*

And All But He Departed, however, contains fewer instances of this concession to strong personal feeling than, say, *The Signal to Advance*, one of his previous books, which is informed by his militant anarchism. It is, in general, a well-controlled collection, relying largely upon a method of implication which is far more successful in producing integrated poems than when

Dr. Comfort is addressing himself directly to his audience. In *Belshazzar and the Wall*, for example, he adapts the familiar biblical story of the "Writing on the Wall" to his purpose in a way which holds the reader's interest and lends itself to significant little touches of irony, and yet effectively communicates all that the poet might wish to say in his most truculent moods. Towards the end of this poem, after the murder of Belshazzar has been described, there is a passage—

> *But between king and king the silence of dust*
> *broke in one moment's kinglessness. Unsleeping*
> *citizens felt it run, an earthquake shock*

—which, echoed as it is throughout the book, seems to reflect a new assurance that, sooner or later, the men and women of whom he writes, the "sleeping citizens", will awaken from their stupor and, recognising at last the fundamental unity of mankind, take appropriate action; that "the turn of the times" will bring about "England's Easter Week." There is, of course, a suggestion of this in earlier books, but it is somewhat unconvincing there and, one suspects, merely an expression of defiance. Whether this certainty will have any vital effect upon Dr. Comfort's poetry or not remains to be seen, but it is noticeable that already his accepted poetic role has changed from that of spokesman for the voiceless to that of provocative listener:

> *I gather your scattered No*
> *your-inarticulate salvage*
> *of bloodymindedness*
> *drive your doubts in a row*
> *as a fence between you and the eyeless, voiceless, press*
>
> *of those who were Citizens*
> *who waited another week,*
> *whose poor disguises failed,*
> *who did not speak soon enough . . .*
>
> *I ask you to speak, not hear.*
> *I am your audience. Give*
> *the disobedient word*
> *that will open history's ear*
> *like the prince's kiss that woke, and the sleepers stirred.*

HOWARD SERGEANT

'WHAT A SET!'

Child of Light by MURIEL SPARK, (Tower Bridge Publications Ltd. 12s. 6d.)

WHEN one has read this most able book, it then seems just as appropriate that a woman should have chosen to reassess Shelley's second wife, Mary Wollstonecraft, as that another woman, Dr. Edith Sitwell, should have re-illuminated the Queen, Elizabeth. In a man's world, regrettably since it is of critical importance, this rightness is not always observed: but women have no illusions about women, they apprehend more accurately than men the emotional patterns of their sex; and above all, they dare be explicit, with out suffering any of the obstructions of chivalry.

Muriel Spark's sensitive and comprehensive book will provide all that the general reader needs, and many things that the expert hasn't thought of, as she shows Mary coming under Shelley's spell, their life together, and her life alone. It is a tangled story, involving many personalities and situations; but most of it is carried off with a considerable style that springs essentially, one feels, from a sharp and quite unsentimental feminine eye.

Consider the accuracy of this assessment: "The Wollstonecrafts were impoverished to the point of want, yet their family connections bore that strain of gentility which banned them from giving their children an education and environment to suit them for work outside their home;" or the restraint of this: "She (Mary Godwin) died on 10th September, leaving Godwin the poorer for the only true grace he ever experienced in womanly affections, and the richer for two children—one aged two, the daughter of an irresponsible vagabond, and the other his own child, a squalling matter of ten days' persistence."

Elsewhere the style has an almost masculine laconism: "Determined to assert herself in some spectacular way, Clair took herself to London and hunted down Lord Byron who was then connected with Drury Lane Theatre. She wanted to become an actress, she told Byron, who very soon had her with child;" or, as when it treats with Fanny, the Godwins' adopted daughter, an irony that only just stops short of the terrible: "Her suicide was Fanny's only decisive gesture; she was right in anticipating the pain her death would cause, and right, too, in thinking that her memory would soon be forgotten."

It would be uncritical if I did not add here that a manner of

such vitality digs its own pitfalls of taste; there is one which talks of 'Shelley's self-generated health salts," and another contained in the list of "literary feminology", early on in the book; but these are of minimal importance.

What is of importance is that Muriel Spark should so courageously, and at times so effectively, have reversed the critical findings of Mr. T. S. Eliot and Dr. Herbert Read, with regard to the Mary-Shelley relationship, and to her qualities as a critic of her husband's poetry.

Notwithstanding, Mrs. Sparke is no wide-eyed admirer of Mary's writing, as will be seen in her detailed criticism of *Frankenstein.*

Part II of *Child of Light* may come in for adverse comment by the academicians—whose grouse might well be that it says so much about Mary's novels that the average reader will find his curiosity satisfied without further exploration! But even they may come to agree that Mrs. Spark has performed a rare service in giving us an abridged version of *The Last Man,* an almost unknown and nearly unobtainable work of some merit.

This is the most enjoyable book on the Shelleys I have read since W. S. Scott brought out his *New Shelley Letters* in 1948, and perhaps the most stimulatingly controversial one I have read since *Ariel.*

HENRY TREECE

EXCURSION

Rainer Maria Rilke—His Life and Work by F. W. VAN HEERIKHUIZEN (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 25s.)
Elizabethan Lyrics by CATHERINE ING (Chatto & Windus 21s.)
Faber Book of Modern Verse with a supplement chosen by ANNE RIDLER (Faber & Faber 12s. 6d.)

I REMEMBER how, one rainy day in the spring of 1939, I walked across Chiswick Green with Rilke's *Duino Elegies* translated by Leishmann under my arm. In spite of the shower and a possible rebuke from the Public Library authorities, I had to flick through the pages in the open, so great was my impatience to read their contents. But let me admit to the shameful truth—when I got the book home I could not understand it! The poems presented a front of unmeaning, like a shining wall of ebony glass.

This frustration benefited me more than any experience of easy access. I returned to the poems time and time again, and it was finally through their portals, and not through those of Eliot or Auden, that I entered the world of modern poetry and began to feel at home in it.

During the years when I sojourned in khaki, Rilke became a great source of release, and I recall how—under his influence—I sat one night in an empty billet until, by an act of receptive attention, the bare drab walls and naked bulb seemed to pulsate with possibility. It was all a matter, Rilke seemed to say, of suspending the practical allocating will, of dethroning the positive intellect and letting existence suggest its secrets to you.

For a long time I feasted my mind on Rilke's delicate invertebrate world. His poems afforded a pure recreation to a life lived almost entirely as duty. Only when the War came to an end and we were once more able to replace duty by self-responsibility, did the full danger of Rilke's view-point, in all its insufficiency, make itself felt.

Rilke wanted always to accept, to cast out nothing: to lose all choice in praise. This shortcoming is justly analysed by F. W. Van Heerikhuizen in his serious, responsive and conscientious study, *Rainer Maria Rilke—his Life and Work*. "Rilke", he writes, "never wholly succeeded in finding the way to human thought, to the male intuition in which thought had place . . . His opinions on various subjects are throughout imbued with a strongly irrationalistic colour. The unity of soul, spirit and body . . . led , . . to a certain devaluation of the spirit, in that the intellect was feared and little known." Rilke did not realise the need of saying No. It is happier far when we can answer Yes, but to do so today on all occasions is treachery rather than a gesture of praise.

I do not, however, wish to give the impression that Mr. Van Heerikhuizen's view of the poet is a carping or censorious one. It is just that he has been the first to evaluate Rilke in the context of his times, and to take into account the problems of the age as well as the personal problems of the poet. When this is done, it is natural that Rilke must yield a little of his stature. Much of the inheritance which the poet leaves us we are still glad to salute as valid, and of this portion Mr. Van Heerikhuizen proves an enthusiastic custodian.

To pass from Rilke's time to that of Elizabeth is to juxtapose, by contrast, two types of lyric poetry, historically determined.

The earlier type is the more formal, the more public in its choice of language, and the more concerned with the possibility of providing phraseology suitable for music. This is the lyric of Wyatt and Sidney, of Campion, Jonson, and sometimes of Shakespeare. The other is the subjective lyric such as we meet with, superlatively, in the poets of the nineteenth century and after: a type of 'private confessional' poem, where the musical element is self-contained, being limited to verbal melody.

This distinction is one of the themes we come across in Catherine Ing's examination of Elizabethan lyrics (or, as the sub-title more specifically informs us, "A Study of the Development of English Metres and their Relation to Poetic Effect").

Catherine Ing, who is a lecturer in English at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, opposes the popularly held belief that the Elizabethan lyrics were the inspired impromptu chatter of a nest of singing birds. Rather, she maintains, were they "the products of highly conscious artists, often working to rule". Nor was their art an insular one, for—as Miss Ing tells us—they were largely influenced by Italian, French, and Spanish metres.

Europeanised sensibility was, indeed, one of the qualities which the late Michael Roberts recognised in much contemporary poetry when he came to compile the *Faber Book of Modern Verse* in 1936, and in his Introduction he made a distinction between those poets possessed of it and those who seemed to write from a more purely English awareness.

Anne Ridler, who has added a fresh selection to this anthology, continues to develop this distinction in a secondary Introduction. The verse of John Heath-Stubbs, she suggests, might be considered as an example of Anglo-Continental sensibility and that of Kathleen Raine as informed by a more purely native thought and feeling. On the whole, it must be admitted, Miss Ridler's remarks are pedestrian and 'bitty'; but when it comes to a choice of new poems her judgment is proved in a surer, finer fashion. Lee, Fuller, Durrel, Rodgers, Fraser, Muir, Watkins and Graham: these are some of her fresh 'additions' (totalling, in all, the work of twenty-four poets). Like all anthologies, the volume shows a bias; in this case, a preference for what I would call the Faber-British Council school of poets. Within these limits, and without—as far as Michael Roberts' own selection went—it is one of the best collections of its kind.

DEREK STANFORD

NATURE AND PSYCHO-ANALYSIS

Every Star a Tongue by MARGARET WILLY (Heinemann, 8s. 6d.)
Clinical Sonnets by MERRILL MOORE (Twayne Press, U.S.A. $2.50)

This is Miss Willy at her best, in my opinion; unashamedly romantic imagery used with a deft and confident hand. She sets the scene, which is a Devonshire inn in spring-time, and describes a familiar sight in fresh and delightful terms. Nor is this an exceptional poem in her new book, for in her natural vein she can write as capably and as sensitively as Dorothy Wordsworth.

She is not, however, quite so much at home in her literary reconstructions such as "Chaucer at Aldgate" where she pictures that highly successful civil servant with too delicate and serious pen, nor do I find her sense of the dramatic, as in "Anne Boleyn in the Tower" altogether convincing. These criticisms apart, however, there is no doubt that she has a pleasant and attractive individuality, and that the quiet unobtrusiveness of her themes and technique should not be allowed to hide the value of her work.

With Merrill Moore, we are in quite a different country. An American doctor, he has long been well known in the States as a poet who has written thousands of sonnets about anything and anybody in a wide range of experimental techniques. His previous work, in fact, is an object lesson both to traditionalists working in too rigid a pattern and also to those moderns who believe that all the older forms have been worked out.

I hesitate, however, to advise anyone who does not know his verse already to start on this new book. It consists of about sixty psycho-analytical studies of his patients, often well done like an up-to-date version of Browning's "Men and Women" but too often bearing all the marks of a clinical investigation. The technique too, has been strained to an extent where the sonnet has been atomised and reverted to fragments of prose in far too many cases. In fairness to Dr. Moore, however, I must confess that these are balanced by some effective and integrated poems such as that which describes a person indifferent to hours passing

Like casual maidens that he never met,
Never knew as women, never really enjoyed;
A natural specimen for Dr. Freud.

JOHN BAYLISS